



South cleans up from tornadoes as blizzards advance north



Visibility on I-94 in the Bismarck, N.D., Mandan area is greatly reduced due to blowing snow across the roadway in this view of westbound traffic on the Grant Marsh Bridge over the Missouri River on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022.

Associated Press

By JAKE BLEIBERG and KEVIN MCGILL
Associated Press

KEITHVILLE, La. (AP) — Communities from Texas to Florida commenced assisting survivors and cleaning up Thursday after tornadoes left scattered destruction and at least three people dead across the South. To the north, blizzards continued to pound the Midwest as more ice and snow headed toward New England.

Three straight days of volatile weather in the South continued Thursday as a possible tornado wrecked a building housing a cotton gin in rural Georgia and forecasters issued a stream of tornado warnings across the Florida peninsula.

The same storm front spawned twisters as it marched from central Texas across Louisiana, where all three storm deaths were confirmed, before destroying farm buildings in Mississippi and tearing roofs off other buildings in Alabama.

In Union Parish, Louisiana, near the Arkansas line, volunteers stocked a gymnasium with donated clothing and other supplies for dozens whose homes were badly damaged or destroyed. "It shows that people love you," said Patsy Andrews, who survived the storm hunkered in a bathtub with her three children. "It shows that people care." Andrews teared up as she recounted how winds blew open her front door early Wednesday in the Union County community of Farmerville as tornado alerts sounded. Windows started breaking with a popping noise like gunfire, she said, as the family crawled into the bathroom. "The only thing we know to do was just crying, we was screaming, just calling on Jesus," Andrews said. She added: "We all grabbed each other, we jumped in the tub. All we could do was just pray. It was very devastating."

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Results of investigation on financial misconduct at Aruba House heard in Parliament



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South cleans up from tornadoes as blizzards advance north

Continued from Front

A few others caught in the storm's path weren't so fortunate.

A man who was out buying groceries Tuesday when a suspected tornado struck rural Keithville, Louisiana, returned to find his mobile home swept away and his wife and 8-year-old son missing. Hours later, authorities discovered the body of Nikolus Little in the woods. His mother, Yoshiko A. Smith, was found dead later, under storm debris.

"He just went to go shopping for his family, came home and the house was gone," Caddo Parish Sheriff's Sgt. Casey Jones said.

A third death was confirmed west of New Orleans in St. Charles Parish, where Sheriff Greg Champagne said eight people went to hospitals with injuries Wednesday and a woman was found dead outside a home. "There was debris everywhere. She could have been struck. We don't know for sure," Champagne said. "But this was a horrific and a very violent tornado."

The National Weather Service can take days to confirm whether destructive winds were in fact tornadoes. Data compiled by the Southern Regional Climate Center at Texas A&M University showed nearly 50 tornadoes reported across six states since Tuesday —



Debris is strewn about following severe weather Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022, in Keithville, La.

Associated Press

the vast majority of them in Louisiana and Mississippi.

In New Orleans, a home collapsed, injuring four people, and five people were injured in New Iberia, Louisiana, where a possible tornado smashed the windows of Iberia Medical Center, authorities said.

"When I came out, all the windows were broken," Lindsey Ronsonet, who was with a friend seeking treatment when the storm hit, told KATC-TV. "They had rain everywhere in there."

In Mississippi, a suspected tornado destroyed four large chicken houses, one

containing 5,000 roosters, Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey said. In Summerville, Alabama, Fire Chief Michael Aaron said storm winds tore away roofing and downed power lines. Before the storm front started moving offshore, police in rural Doerun, Georgia, reported that a suspected tornado struck a large building housing a cotton gin, leaving a sagging heap of bent metal. No injuries were reported, the police department said in a Facebook post.

Further to the north, the National Weather Service

issued blizzard warnings Thursday in the Dakotas as well as portions of Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska. As the storm moves eastward, interior parts of the Northeast could accumulate as much as one foot (30 centimeters) of snow, said Zach Taylor, a weather service meteorologist in College Park, Maryland. "It really, truly has been a coast-to-coast winter storm that has affected a large portion of the country, and that doesn't begin to even mention the severe weather in the South," Taylor said. "When you put it all

together, most of the country has been affected."

Roger Hainy, who owns a farm near Wessington Springs in central South Dakota, said he was shut in after blowing snow formed drifts that made the roads impassable. Hainy's farm lost power earlier in the week when freezing rain hit the area.

"Back when I was a kid we used to have three-day blizzards, but this one is going to be four days," Hainy said. "It's been a long time since we've had one like this."

In Bismarck, North Dakota, an additional four inches (10 centimeters) of snow were expected Thursday to top a foot that has already accumulated. Wind gusts of 60 miles per hour (96 kph) prompted a no-travel advisory for major highways.

"The wind and ice — it's miserable, and a lot of people are in the ditches," said Dean Cota, manager of the Starmart Travel Center, where the parking lot was full of truckers waiting out the storm. "Everything's just slick and it's blowing vehicles right off the road." In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state is well prepared for several inches of snow expected in some areas over the coming days. During a briefing in Albany, Hochul said there's also a chance that strong winds could topple power lines. □



A video of President Donald Trump is shown on a screen, as the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol holds a hearing at the Capitol in Washington, July 21, 2022.

Associated Press

By FARNOUSH AMIRI

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Capitol riot will

hold its final meeting Monday, wrapping up its year-and-a-half-long inquiry by asking the Justice Department to investigate poten-

Jan. 6 committee to vote Monday on riot criminal referrals

tial crimes.

The committee of seven Democrats and two Republicans has interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses, held nearly a dozen hearings and collected millions of documents as it worked to create the most comprehensive record of the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021. The chairman, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., has said the committee will make criminal referrals to the Justice Department recommending prosecution, but has not disclosed who the

targets would be or whether former President Donald Trump would be among them. The committee has focused squarely on Trump and efforts by the then president in the weeks before the attack to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden. It would fall to federal prosecutors to decide whether to pursue any referrals for prosecution. Lawmakers have suggested charges against Trump could include conspiracy to defraud the United States and

obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress. Recommendations by the committee would add to the political pressure on the Justice Department as it investigates Trump's actions. The committee on Wednesday is expected to release its final report, which could include hundreds of pages of findings about the attack and Trump's efforts to subvert democracy. Committee members will review the highlights of their findings at the Monday meeting. □

U.S. plans for more migrant releases when asylum limits end

By REBECCA SANTANA and ELLIOT SPAGAT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security said more migrants may be released into the United States to pursue immigration cases when Trump-era asylum restrictions end next week, when a Texas congressman says some border officials estimate about 50,000 migrants could be waiting to cross into the U.S.

In one of its most detailed assessments ahead of the major policy shift, the department reported faster processing for migrants in custody on the border, more temporary detention tents, staffing surges and increased criminal prosecutions of smugglers, noting progress on a plan announced in April.

But the seven-page document dated Tuesday included no major structural changes amid unusually large numbers of migrants entering the country. More are expected with the end of Title 42 authority, under which migrants have been denied rights to seek asylum more than 2.5 million times on grounds of preventing spread of COVID-19.



Migrants wait to cross the US-Mexico border from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022.

A federal judge in Washington ordered Title 42 to end Dec. 21 but Republican-led states asked an appeals court to keep it in place. The Biden administration has also challenged some aspects of the ruling, though it doesn't oppose letting the rule lapse next week. The legal back-and-forth could go down to the wire.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

traveled this week to El Paso, Texas, which witnessed a large influx Sunday after becoming the busiest corridor for illegal crossings in October. El Paso has been a magnet for Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, Cubans, Colombians, Ecuadoreans and other nationalities.

The geographic shift to Texas' westernmost reaches was likely a result of smugglers' calculations on the

best route, said Nicolas Palazzo, an attorney at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso.

Like other advocacy groups that work directly with Homeland Security, Palazzo said he has had no conversations with the department about post-Title 42 planning. One key question: How will authorities process migrants who have long been waiting to seek asylum?

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, said Customs and Border Protection officials told him Wednesday that about 50,000 migrants are believed to be waiting to cross once Title 42 is lifted.

Authorities plan to admit those seeking asylum who go through ports of entry but return to Mexico those who cross illegally between official crossings, Cuellar said in an interview. It was unclear how they will return nationalities that Mexico won't accept like Cubans and Nicaraguans and are difficult to send home due to strained diplomatic relations and other challenges. Administration officials are developing additional measures, which Cuellar said they would not disclose. "I think the first week is going to be a little bit of chaos," he said. U.S. officials in El Paso are currently exempting 70 migrants daily from Title 42, said Palazzo, who questioned how officials will handle more people.

Unless they raise processing capacity significantly, migrants who go through official crossings may be told to wait a year or so for an appointment, said Palazzo. □

Associated Press

White House reveals winter COVID-19 plans, more free tests

By ZEKE MILLER

AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is again making some free COVID-19 tests available to all U.S. households as it unveils its contingency plans for potential coronavirus surges this winter.

After a three-month hiatus, the administration is making four rapid virus tests available per household through covidtests.gov starting Thursday. COVID-19 cases have shown a marked increase after the Thanksgiving holiday, and further increases are projected from indoor gathering and travel around Christmas and New Year's. The administration is put-

ting personnel and equipment on standby should they be needed to help overwhelmed hospitals and nursing homes, as was necessary in earlier waves of the virus. So far, there have been no requests for assistance, but surge teams, ventilators and personal protective equipment are ready, the White House said.

The Biden administration is also urging states and local governments to do more to encourage people to get the updated bivalent COVID-19 vaccines, which scientists say are more effective at protecting against serious illness and death from the currently circulating variants. The administration is reiterating best

practices to nursing homes and long-term care facilities for virus prevention and treatment and is urging administrators as well as governments to encourage vulnerable populations to get the new shots.

The planning comes as the administration has struggled to persuade most Americans to get the updated boosters as cases and deaths have declined from pandemic highs and most people have embraced a return to most of their pre-pandemic activities.

A White House official said the new tests would come from the national stockpile, which still has reserves after the administration shut off the at-home testing pro-

gram in September. New tests would be procured to replace tests distributed over the coming weeks under existing funding author-

ities. The Biden administration is still asking Congress for billions of dollars in additional funding for the virus response. □



President Joe Biden speaks to African leaders gathered for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

House approves referendum to 'decolonize' Puerto Rico

By **FARNOUSH AMIRI** and **DÁNICA COTO**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. House passed a bill Thursday that would allow Puerto Rico to hold the first-ever binding referendum on whether to become a state or gain some sort of independence, in a last-ditch effort that stands little chance of passing the Senate.

The bill, which passed 233-191 with some Republican support, would offer voters in the U.S. territory three options: statehood, independence or independence with free association.

"It is crucial to me that any proposal in Congress to decolonize Puerto Rico be informed and led by Puerto Ricans," said Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz., chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, which oversees affairs in U.S. territories. The proposal would commit Congress to accept Puerto Rico into the United States as the 51st state if voters on the island approved it. Voters also could choose outright independence or independence with free association, whose terms would be defined following



A woman waves the flag of Puerto Rico during a news conference on Puerto Rican statehood on Capitol Hill in Washington, March 2, 2021.

negotiations over foreign affairs, U.S. citizenship and use of the U.S. dollar. Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, who has worked on the issue throughout his career, said it was "a long and torturous path" to get the proposal to the House floor. "For far too long, the people of Puerto Rico have been excluded from the full promise of American democracy and self-determi-

nation that our nation has always championed," the Maryland Democrat said. After passing the Democrat-controlled House, the bill now goes to a split Senate where it faces a ticking clock before the end of the year and Republican lawmakers who have long opposed statehood. Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi, of the pro-statehood New Progressive Par-

ty, traveled to Washington for the vote. He called it a historic day and said the 3.2 million U.S. citizens who live on the island lack equality, do not have fair representation in the federal government and cannot vote in general elections. "This has not been an easy fight. We still have work to do," he said. "Our quest to decolonize Puerto Rico is a civil rights issue."

Members of his party, including Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Jennifer González, cheered the approval of the bill, although reaction in the U.S. territory was largely muted and tinged with frustration since it is expected to be voted down in the Senate. The proposal of a binding referendum has exasperated many on an island that already has held seven nonbinding referendums on its political status, with no overwhelming majority emerging. The last referendum was held in November 2020, with 53% of votes for statehood and 47% against, with only a little more than half of registered voters participating. The proposed binding referendum would be the first time that Puerto Rico's current status as a U.S. commonwealth is not included as an option, a blow to the main opposition Popular Democratic Party, which upholds the status quo. Pablo José Hernández Rivera, an attorney in Puerto Rico, said approval of the bill by the House would be "inconsequential" like the approval of previous bills in 1998 and 2010. □

Associated Press

Hacker claims breach of FBI's critical-infrastructure portal

By **FRANK BAJAK**
AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — A hacker who reportedly posed as the CEO of a financial institution claims to have obtained access to the more than 80,000-member data-

base of InfraGard, an FBI-run outreach program that shares sensitive information on national security and cybersecurity threats with public officials and private sector actors who run U.S. critical infrastructure.

The hacker posted samples they said were from the database to an online forum popular with cybercriminals last weekend and said they were asking \$50,000 for the entire database. The hacker obtained access to InfraGard's online portal by posing as the CEO of a financial institution, they told independent cybersecurity journalist Brian Krebs, who broke the story. They called the vetting process surprisingly lax. The FBI declined to comment. Krebs reported that the agency told him it was aware of a potential false account and was looking into the matter. InfraGard's membership is a veritable critical infrastructure Who's Who. It includes business leaders, IT

professionals, military, state and local law enforcement and government officials involved in overseeing the safety of everything from the electrical grid and transportation, to health care, pipelines, nuclear reactors, the defense industry, dams and water plants and financial services. Founded in 1996, it is the FBI's largest public-private partnership, with local alliances affiliated with all its field offices. It regularly shares threat advisories from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security and serves as a behind-closed-doors social media site for select insiders. The database has the names, affiliations and contact information for tens of thousands of InfraGard us-

ers. Krebs first reported its theft on Tuesday. The hacker, going by the username USDoD on the BreachForums site, said on the site that records of only 47,000 of the forum's members' — slightly more than half — include unique emails. The hacker also posted that the data contained neither Social Security numbers nor dates of birth. Although fields existed in the database for that information, InfraGard's security-conscious users had left them blank. However, the hacker told Krebs that they had been messaging InfraGard members, posing as the financial institution's CEO, to try to obtain more personal data that could be criminally weaponized. □



An FBI seal is seen on a wall on Aug. 10, 2022, in Omaha, Neb. Associated Press

U.N. Irish peacekeeper killed in shooting in southern Lebanon

By **ABBY SEWELL** and
KAREEM CHEHAYEB
Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Irish U.N. peacekeeper was killed and several others were wounded when unidentified attackers opened fire on a convoy in southern Lebanon, Irish and Lebanese military officials said Thursday. The area is a stronghold of the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group.

The Irish Defense Forces said in a statement that a pair of armored vehicles carrying eight Irish troops from the U.N. peacekeeping mission, known as UNIFIL, was fired on as they drove north, toward Beirut on Wednesday night near the town of Al-Aqbiya.

The Irish military identified the killed peacekeeper as Pvt. Seán Rooney of Newtowncunningham, Ireland. It noted that one of the three wounded soldiers was in serious condition. It did not identify the assailants.

UNIFIL confirmed that one peacekeeper was killed and three were wounded but did not share further details.

"Our thoughts are also with the local civilians who may have been injured or frightened during the incident," UNIFIL spokesperson Andrea Tenenti said, adding that "details are sparse and



Lebanese soldiers stand next to a damaged UN peacekeeper vehicle at the scene where a UN peacekeeper convoy came under gunfire in the Al-Aqbiya village, south Lebanon, Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022.

conflicting." Tenenti added that UNIFIL is coordinating with the Lebanese military and trying to "determine exactly what happened." A person familiar with the investigation said that the armored vehicle carrying the peacekeepers had rolled over while trying to escape the scene after locals began shooting.

Local residents were angered and became aggressive when two UNIFIL armored vehicles, which were heading to the Beirut airport, took a detour

through Al-Aqbiya, which is not part of the area under UNIFIL's mandate, the person said. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and therefore spoke on condition of anonymity.

A security official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said seven bullets were retrieved from the vehicle. Rooney was killed with a bullet to the head, the official said, indicating the fatal bullet would likely be a key piece of evidence in

the investigation.

Lebanon's Foreign Ministry condemned the incident, while the office of Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati issued a statement calling for an investigation.

Mikati "praised the sacrifices that UNIFIL forces made to maintain peace in the south, which reflects stability for the people of the region and Lebanon in general," the statement said.

Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin expressed his condolences in a statement on

Twitter.

"It is a reminder that our peacekeepers serve in dangerous circumstances, at all times, in the cause of peace," he said.

Cell phone videos circulated online show one of the two UNIFIL vehicles speeding to leave the area while it was shot at. Some residents were visible filming the incident. Another video showed the vehicle had rolled over after crashing into the aluminum shutters of a building, with a wounded peacekeeper on the ground beside it.

Al-Manar TV, run by Hezbollah, claimed that a UNIFIL vehicle had "run over" a group of residents who had gathered to watch the World Cup semi-final match between Morocco and France. A Hezbollah spokesperson contacted by The Associated Press declined to comment on peacekeeper's death "until we have all the data."

At the U.N. headquarters in New York ahead of a U.N. Security Council meeting, Ireland's Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said 23-year-old Rooney was in one of the two armored vehicles left the Irish base camp for Beirut, each with four personnel. □

"The vehicles, for whatever reason, got separated,

Danish Prime Minister Frederiksen presents new government

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Thursday presented a three-party majority coalition that crosses the left-right divide and includes the leader of the Liberal Party and a former prime minister in key jobs.

It was the first time in 44 years that such a centrist government had been formed, bringing an end to the two blocs that have opposed each other for decades.

Liberal leader Jakob Ellemann-Jensen became defense minister while former prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen who once

headed the Liberals but left it and created earlier this year the centrist Moderate party that wanted to bridge the center gap was put in charge of foreign affairs. The government will have 23 ministries, of which Frederiksen's Social Democrats get 11 offices while the Liberals get seven and the Moderates five. There are eight women and 15 men.

The new governing coalition was announced late Tuesday after 42 days of talks following the Nov. 1 general elections. The three parties control 89 seats in the 179-seat parliament and are also supported by

the four lawmakers representing the semi-independent Danish territories of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands.

The last time Denmark was governed by a centrist coalition was in 1978 when the Social Democrats teamed up with the Liberals. That lasted eight months.

Frederiksen was forced to call the vote earlier this year amid the fallout from her government's contentious decision to cull millions of minks as a pandemic response measure. The cull and chilling images of mass graves of minks haunted Frederiksen since 2020 and eventually led to cracks in

the center-left bloc.

During the election campaign, Frederiksen had said

she wanted to aim for a center-right government after the vote. □



Acting Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen presents the new Danish government at Marienborg Castle, in Kongens Lyngby, Denmark, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022.

Associated Press

Venezuela's Maduro enters 2023 seeking global recognition

By REGINA GARCIA CANO
Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was not invited to a summit of Western Hemisphere leaders in June. But by October, he traveled to Egypt for a conference where he joked with French President Emmanuel Macron and shook hands with John Kerry, the U.S. government's climate envoy. The encounters, with a towering Maduro graciously smiling throughout, were carefully captured on video, posted on social media and broadcast on Venezuela's state television.

A few months short of a decade since he inherited the country's leadership upon the death of President Hugo Chávez, Maduro is working to regain the international recognition he lost when his 2018 re-election was deemed a sham by dozens of nations.

Those efforts are also aimed at bolstering his strength at home as he enters 2023 while pressure mounts for a free and fair presidential election the following year. Crucial to Maduro's calculations are his country's top asset oil and the war in Ukraine.

The South American country has the world's largest



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, center, stands next to the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, center right, as leaders prepare themselves for a group photo at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Nov. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

proven oil reserves, but it has not supplied the West's market since the U.S. imposed crippling economic sanctions as democracy and human rights deteriorated after Maduro's re-election.

The international community wants "some kind of contribution to global energy security, and with Russian oil off the market, Venezuelan oil becomes attractive again," said Ryan Berg, director of the Americas program at the Center for

Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

Maduro's attempt to clean up his image comes as many of the conditions that turned him into an international pariah remain unchanged.

Independent experts working with the U.N.'s top human rights body have documented a systemic attack on government opponents, journalists and others. Their report in September alleged Maduro

personally ordered the detention of government opponents, who endured electric shocks, asphyxiation and other cruel acts while in custody.

An economic crisis that began during Chávez's last months in office has only worsened during Maduro's presidency. It has driven roughly 7 million Venezuelans to leave the country, made the local currency worthless and pushed millions into poverty.

Under Maduro, who suc-

ceeded Chavez in 2013, about three-quarters of the population lives on less than \$1.90 a day — the international benchmark of extreme poverty. Power outages are part of everyday life, and water supply is severely restricted.

"He's trying to project an image of strength, but the reality is that he's just incredibly thirsty right now for international attention," said Geoff Ramsey, director of Venezuela research at the U.S.-based Washington Office on Latin America think tank. "We saw this from Cairo, where he was ambushing world leaders and then projecting these hallway encounters as if they were official state visits."

Maduro has serious cash-flow problems and wants access to the international financial system and the U.S. oil market, Ramsey said. But, he added, the only way Maduro likely will get access to dollars again is by engaging in negotiations with the opposition.

Talks between Maduro and the opposition, including the faction backed by the U.S. government, were suspended for more than a year after one of his key allies was extradited to the U.S. from Africa. □

El Salvador congress extends gang crackdown yet again

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — The congress of El Salvador has voted to extend President Nayib

Bukele's emergency powers to crack down on gangs for yet another month. The vote late Wednesday

extends for the ninth time the measures, enacted after a surge in murders in March, and ensures they will last into 2023. The crackdown appears to have widespread popular support despite evidence of abuses.

More than 60,000 people have been arrested under the measures, which suspend some constitutional rights and gives police more powers to arrest and hold suspects.

Activists say it has led to human rights abuses, and Salvadoran officials said they will review prison conditions with human rights groups starting in January. Rights activists say young men

are frequently arrested just based on their age, on their appearance or whether they live in a gang-dominated slum.

The country's human rights official, Raquel Caballero, said 2,100 people have been released after arrest because they had no ties to the street gangs.

El Salvador's gangs, which have been estimated to count some 70,000 members in their ranks, have long controlled swaths of territory and extorted and killed with impunity.

Recent polls show support for the measures reaching nearly 90% among Salvadorans.

Bukele has begun sealing

off certain sectors of cities in El Salvador, surrounding them with police and soldiers, and checking anyone entering or leaving.

Bukele requested Congress grant him extraordinary powers after gangs were blamed for 62 killings on March 26.

Under the decree, the right of association, the right to be informed of the reason for an arrest and access to a lawyer are suspended. The government also can intervene in the calls and mail of anyone they consider a suspect. The time someone can be held without charges is extended from three days to 15 days. □



A handcuffed man, arrested for alleged gang connections, waits to be transferred to a prison at the police delegation of San Bartolo in Soyapango, El Salvador, Aug. 16, 2022.

Associated Press

Results of investigation on financial misconduct at Aruba House heard in Parliament

ORANJESTAD – A year after members of Parliament requested the complete report on the investigation of the Central Accounting Service (CAD) on allegations of financial misconduct by ex-Plenipotenciary Minister of Aruba in the Netherlands, members of the Wever-Croes Cabinet together with the director of CAD presented the results of this investigation to Parliament.

On Tuesday, 13th of December, prime minister of Aruba, Mrs. Evelyn Wever-Croes, Mr. Roland Pang of CAD and Mr. Gilbert Wernet of the Department of Human Resources (DRH) were in Parliament during a public meeting to give information regarding the investigation at Aruba House in The Hague. Wever-Croes said in a press release that "this is a topic that garnered a lot of attention since it started, even political attention in Parliament and in various occasions I received letters from Parliament asking for more information. The Government said that it is important to carry out the investigation and to not hinder it."

Wever-Croes said that the decision to open an investigation began with an e-mail she received in September 2021 addressed to the Council of Ministers and some MPs, mentioning possible irregularities allegedly taking place at Aruba House. "Indeed there were rumors before this. It was an anonymous e-mail that I received a few months earlier, in May 2021. An e-mail saying it is from a group of personnel of Aruba House. Right away I got in contact with them and asked them to provide proof of what they were saying because then I could take action and investigate. Regrettably no reply came. I contacted people that I knew

over there and they all told me they didn't write the e-mail", she said.

But in September 2021 an e-mail with proof was received, and the prime minister said she immediately contacted CAD and DRH and the Council of Ministers to discuss the topic and immediately start an investigation on Aruba House. The government also sent a delegation to the Netherlands to ensure that everything found in the investigation to be wrong, would be right from then on.

Their first impression at Aruba House was that there was a need for reinforcement in the beginning of 2022. The Government sent a delegation consisting of one person from DRH and a budget coordinator from her ministry. Because Aruba House is in the Netherlands, their financial system is different and they did not have immediate access to all information, she said.

Wever-Croes indicated that the preliminary conclusion from this visit after CAD was quite advanced with their investigation was that the government needs to introduce change to Aru-



ba House. The government changed the top of Aruba House. The investigation continued, and the government introduced necessary changes to avoid that the financial misconduct continued, she said.

Preliminary conclusions back then indicated three people were involved doing things that "were considered normal in the past", as they argued in their defense. In the past, such misconduct regularly took place.

Mr. Pang said that the investigation focused on irregularities found with the use of a pin-card, where they noticed a large number of transactions. After evaluating these, they identified public servants involved in the expenses. The investigation focused on the last 18 months, covering 22,000 euros spent using a pin-card.

The investigation found expenses for lodging, gasoline and meals, which were already covered by a daily stipend, thus the ex-minister was receiving money in his pocket while using the card to cover the expenses the money was intended to cover. Some of these expenses, according to Mr. Pang, were incurred in periods when the minister was not in service, namely during vacations.

The investigation also uncovered irregularities in payments for dinners and lunches. CAD noted that a large sum was being spent on this compared to previous years. Furthermore, Mr. Pang said that previous ministers would regularly provide information about these meals, for example, who was invited or who they sat with and which topics were discussed. However, the ex-minister in question refused to provide this information. Pang

commented that whenever public funds are used, information needs to be provided.

Nevertheless, according to our reporter, it is unlikely that the ex-minister will be prosecuted. This is because the prime minister indicated that he has agreed to pay back the money going back 18 months, and thus the Public Prosecution Service will not open a penal case against him.

Opposition members criticized the way in which the information was presented, requesting for the entire (redacted) report to be provided to Parliament. They also questioned the period covered in the investigation – 18 months – asking why the investigation did not cover the entire mandate of the ex-minister. Pang indicated that they worked with the information they had available. □



Paseo Herencia is always fun and exciting to visit



NOORD— Paseo Herencia offers a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options in an outdoor center located in the heart of Palm Beach – walking distance from the high-rise hotels.

Shopping

The Paseo Herencia stores offer a great collection in beach wear, clothing, perfume, shoes, jewelry, souvenirs and much more. Pamper yourself by visiting Maggy's and enjoy their salon services and shop for your favorite beauty products. Aruba Aloe has that perfect gift to bring back home, all made with natural ingredients. Other brand favorites are Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens, Nike store, Pandora and many more.

Restaurants

Start with a breakfast meal at Paseo Herencia offering unique breakfast options such as Drunk's Denial with their Make it Your Own Crêpe Bar offering sweet and savory crêpe flavors and the option to booze it up with their Mimosa crêpe (mandarin soaked in

champagne), Pina Colada (pineapples in coconut rum), Bourbon Apple, Brandy Apricot, Whiskey Pear and more. Location can be found by following the bakery smell upon arrival. Another option is Seabarita offering you delicious breakfast options ranging from Huevos Rancheros to empanadas surrounded by a cozy picnic setting with streetside view. Go Argentinian style at Che Bar and try their delicious omelet with chorizo/ham, mozzarella, onions, peppers, and tomatoes served with skillet potatoes and toast. Looking for something for the whole family? Visit TGI Fridays and choose between waffle, omelets, breakfast sandwiches and tacos starting at \$8. These restaurants are also open for lunch & dinner offering you a variety of cuisine choices. If you're looking for more unique concepts, join us for dinner at Xixon Restaurant greatly known in Miami for their Spanish inspired dishes with top notch flavors and the largest wine variety or visit The Lazy Turtle and try their exotic African dish "Kuvuta Kuku" accompanied by their tasty lazy cocktails. Coming for drinks? Sip and have a good time at the Bulldog Aruba located in the cen-

ter of the Plaza. Open till late.

VIP Cinema

Visit the one-of-a-kind Caribbean Cinemas VIP on the second floor of Paseo Herencia and enjoy your favorite movies in the most comfortable reclining seats with high quality screens with the latest projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound and not to forget their delicious buttery bag of popcorn.

Entertainment

Catch live shows from Monday to Thursday and Sunday at 8pm on the Paseo center stage and the nightly water shows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Looking for some adrenaline? Visit the Airsoft experience located behind The Lazy Turtle. Snap Instagramable pictures at the Angel Wings located between Pandora and Free Spirit or the Flying mosaic hearts located behind King Churros. Parking up to two hours is free when shopping, dining or catching a movie at Paseo Herencia. Just present your purchase receipt at our parking cashier.

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39 Customs officials graduated as Principal Clerks Import and Excise



ORANJESTAD - Recently, 39 Customs officials received their diplomas after completing the Principal Clerks Import and Excise Department program.

The program has a two-year duration, but due to the post-Covid-19 was shortened to 1 year.

This time, the program focused more on the practical part in which these officers learned from realistic and relevant cases relat-

ed to the job description. This change is in line with the government's vision to modernize the service provided by Customs to the community.

The Minister of Finance and Culture, Mrs. Xiomara Maduro, attended the graduation ceremony and gave a brief speech in which she congratulated these 39 Customs Officers on this special day but also thanked them for their efforts to continue to grow

professionally in their career. The Minister expressed pride that Aruba now has 39 Principal Clerks Import and Excise who believe in their growth potential.

'It is important as individuals and as professionals to keep developing as this contributes to a better Customs service to our community. Each investment in our formation is an investment in a better service to our community,' the Minister stated. □



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Don't forget to visit Aruba's famous Red Anchor

At the south east coast of the island, standing alone on a windswept and barren land stands a popular Aruba landmark – a large anchor. It overlooks the sea just beyond, watching over the shipping lanes. It stands there in memory and in honor of all seamen who have lost their life at sea.

Where to Find the Anchor?

The anchor is a "must see" landmark when you visit Aruba. It is among the most photographed historical landmarks for the island. You want to make sure you add this stop on your itinerary when your visiting the south coast of Aruba. The bright red anchor against the backdrop of the deep blue Caribbean sea and the azure blue skies, make a great backdrop for your vacation pictures.

The anchor is located at the entrance to Gate 6 to the former Lago Colony. It is on the outskirts of Seroe Colorado, on the south east point of the island at the "T" junction to Baby Beach.

Depending on where you are staying on the is-

land, follow the signs that indicate the way to Baby Beach. Once you reach the T-junction, it will be right in front of you.

About the Anchor Size

It will be hard to miss the anchor, it's huge! The anchor that weighs 21,772 kilos, is approximately 10 feet 6 inches wide and 15 feet, 6 inches tall.

On the anchor there are some numbers. The 4112 and 4115, which are believed to be the serial numbers that refer to the "fluke" or horizontal and vertical parts of the anchor, respectively. The number 21772K refers to the weight of the anchor in kilos.

This type of anchor was manufactured by Hoesch Dortmund Horde, at a foundry located in Germany.

Where did the Anchor Come From?

There are a number of stories as to the origins of the anchor, which one do you think it was? (Unfortunately the mystery has never been solved, so your imagination can pick which one you think it might be!)

Story 1:

"According to Mr. Man-

uel M. Curiel, an ex-Lago Tug Captain, a fully laden VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) was seeking a mooring at the 15-mile anchorage, known as Bara, on the southern part of the island. This is the usual shallow mooring location for ships awaiting orders, etc. The weather was rough with strong current. The normal procedure is that they would walk out three shackles (about 90 feet) until the anchor touches the bottom while the chain must rest on the bottom. Subsequently, they will walk out some extra shackles and when the ship starts to swing or lean on one side, the anchor is properly set. Because of the rough weather, unfortunately they did not get the time to walk out the extra tackles and because of the tension exerted on the winch, it broke, and they lost the anchor and its chain."

Story 2:

"Mr. Curiel also said that at one time a small tanker with a Korean crew, while lifting their anchor also lifted another anchor near the inner harbor. When the ship asked for assistance, he went with his tugboat along

with a barge, to help. But eventually they had to cut the chain and let the anchor go to the bottom because they could not untangle them."

How Did The Anchor Become a Landmark?

Sometime between 1980 and 1985, three gentlemen (Mr. Wim Martinus – the Harbormaster of Aruba; Mr. August Genser – the ex-Division Superintendent of Lago's Laboratory; and Mr. Willie Davis – Owner of Filtec at Zeewijk in San Nicolas), were having a conversation with Mr. Charlie Brouns Jr. at his famous Charlie's Bar and Restaurant in San Nicolas. Charlie, who was a visionary and had dreams for developing the San Nicolas area, told these gentlemen that he would like to come up with something innovative for the San Nicolas area to draw tourism to the area.

The "anchor", which at that time was being stored at the Oranjestad harbor, was suggested as an option. Charlie liked the idea! He then contacted the President of Lago for permission to acquire the anchor. He was granted permission and the anchor was then

relocated to its present location and dedicated "To All Seamen" on the occasion of the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery on March 31, 1985.

Through the Years

Through the years the Anchor was slowly weathering from the wind and salt. As time passed, sadly the origin and purpose of the anchor slowly faded away from people's memories.

After Charles Brouns Jr died on September 15, 2004, his friend Mr. Sam Speziale, requested assistance from the management of Valero Aruba Refinery to help maintain the monument. The Valero Aruba Refinery, graciously sandblasted and painted the anchor and poured a concrete pad around it. On April 17, 2005, the anchor monument was rededicated "To All Seamen" in a formal ceremony in memory of Charles Brouns Jr.

Today, the anchor stands both as memorial to all seaman who have lost their lives at sea, but also as a silent reminder that Seroe Colorado is part of San Nicolas and that San Nicolas is still a vibrant and important part of the island of Aruba.



The Best Time to Visit
When your planning your visit to the south end of the island, you will want to include in your itinerary the many things to see and do there. The anchor will be just one of these stops, (keep an eye out for our future editions, we publish our recommendations!).

With that being said, I have to say, if you enjoy catching a sunrise, the anchor is one of the best places on the island to catch the sunrise. But in reality, anytime is a good time to visit, depending on your personal schedule. ☐

Team Dreyer Aruba satisfied with their performance in Colombia



ORANJESTAD – Last week, Team Dreyer Aruba departed to Colombia to represent our island in the tournament Future Soccer Cup, FSC. Yesterday afternoon, Team Dreyer returned to Aruba, and coach Jimena Borja told us about the tournament and how it went for team Aruba.

Borja, who coaches the U11 team for Team Dreyer, explained that the team from Aruba played a total of four official games. Out of these four games they won two and lost two, a very good result for the team seeing as this was their first time travelling and playing internationally.

"We think it is an extremely good result for us. Obviously things could have gone better, but for it to be the first time that we went abroad with the team that has been working really hard these past few months, it went really great", Borja indicated.

She said that in the last game, Team Dreyer went against Deportivo Pereira. It was an encounter against the U11 team from Pereira, who are the current champions of the top division in Colombia. Team Dreyer tied 1-1 in the game, and then in penalties they managed to win 5-4. "It was an incredible experience for them, especially because they played U11 against U11 for the first time, a very good training", she emphasized.

Borja added that from what they got to experi-



ence, soccer in Colombia is of a very high level. However she is very pleased with the good work the kids did in the challenges they faced. She also mentioned that the week they spent in Colombia was a beautiful experience both for the players as for the parents, because they got to know each other outside of soccer.

Regarding differences with the Colombian teams and what Aruba can improve, Borja explained that in Colombia, the kids are training to become professionals; this is one of the first things they noticed. She said that she spoke with different coaches and they train with the mentality that the kids have to reach the professional level.

"You can see that they understand soccer in a different way completely. I spoke with different coaches and they are training the kids not for fun, not for hobby, not to keep them busy and out of the house, but they are training them to become professionals and to see soccer as a profession. Perhaps here in Aruba we need to switch the mentality and begin preparing the kids for that", Borja commented.

Finalizing, Borja said that they are already thinking about the next experience, and now the real work will begin for the next tournament. The team is working towards their next match, but they are sure they will have two international participations in 2023: one in South America and one in North America. □

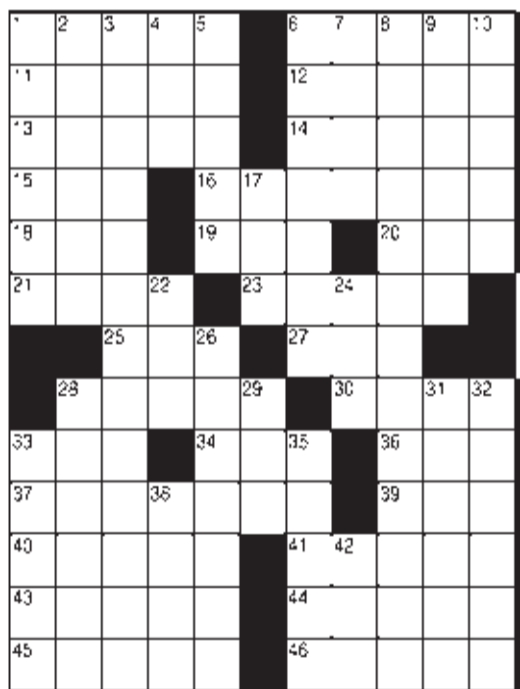
CROSSWORD

By **THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS**
- 41 Admit (to)
 - 1 Swaggering
 - 6 Kaaba setting
 - 11 Different
 - 12 Clear sky
 - 13 Position
 - 14 Set off
 - 15 Melody
 - 16 Guarantees
 - 18 Suffering
 - 19 Diamond stat
 - 20 Place down
 - 21 Abel's brother
 - 23 Director DeMille
 - 25 Diamond stat
 - 27 Wish undone
 - 28 Ship poles
 - 30 Diminishes
 - 33 Yacht spot
 - 34 Trig function, for short
 - 36 Hoppy brew
 - 37 Arrest paper
 - 39 Surgeon eggs
 - 40 Having tattoos
- DOWN**
- 1 Tiled art
 - 2 Hun head
 - 3 Jazz saxophonist
 - 4 Brood watcher
 - 5 Command
 - 6 Mark of the NHL
 - 7 Words from Caesar
 - 8 Jazz saxophonist
 - 9 Breakfast choice
 - 10 Pretentious
 - 17 "Today" carrier
 - 22 Gun grp.
 - 24 Stage prompt
 - 26 Play places
 - 28 Medium meeting
 - 29 Heir, at times
 - 31 Shirt's kin
 - 32 Oozed
 - 33 Free-throw
 - 35 Squall sound
 - 38 Tear asunder
 - 42 Tiny



Yesterday's answer



12-16

AXYDLBAXR
IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three I's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-16

CRYPTOQUOTE

DZRKR FU MQDZFMW FM DZR
YQKSC UQ FKKRUFUDFOSG
PQMDNWFQLU NU SNIWZDRK
NMC WQQC ZLIQIK

— PZKSRU CFPARMU

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: LEARN FROM YESTERDAY, LIVE FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW. THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT TO STOP QUESTIONING. — ALBERT EINSTEIN

Retail sales drop at start of key holiday shopping season

By **CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Americans cut back sharply on retail spending last month as the holiday shopping season began with high prices and rising interest rates forcing families, particularly lower income households, to make harder decisions about what they buy.

Retail sales fell 0.6% from October to November after a sharp 1.3% rise the previous month, the government said Thursday. Sales fell at furniture, electronics, and home and garden stores.

Americans' spending has been resilient ever since inflation first spiked almost 18 months ago, but the capacity of Americans to continue spending in a period of high inflation may be beginning to ebb. Inflation has retreated from the four-decade high it reached this summer but remains elevated, enough to erode the spending



Shoppers carry bags down Fifth Avenue on Friday, Nov. 25, 2022, in New York.

Associated Press

power of Americans. Prices rose 7.1% in November from a year ago.

"The weakness in sales ... suggests that higher borrowing costs, slower employment growth and an unusually low saving rate are now catching up with consumers," said Andrew Hunter, senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics. Consumer spending is still likely to grow at a solid pace in the final three months of the year, Hunt-

er said, but he expects a sharp drop early next year. Monthly sales data can be volatile and one negative report is often followed by a rebound, other economists said.

Sales plunged 2.3% at auto dealers, and slipped 0.6% at sporting goods stores and 0.1% at general merchandise stores, a category that includes large chains such as Walmart and Target. Sales at online and catalog stores fell 0.9%. □

U.S. charges 8 in social media 'pump-and-dump' stock scheme



The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission building in Washington is pictured on Aug. 5, 2017.

Associated Press

By **MATT OTT**

AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The government on Wednesday charged eight men of earning more than \$100 million in illicit stock market profits by manipulating their novice-investor followers on social media.

The Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission said that from early 2020 to around April of this year the men, who had combined following of over 1.5 million on Twitter, ran a "pump-and-dump" scheme. Seven of the social-media influencers promoted themselves as successful traders on Twitter and in Discord chat rooms and encouraged their followers to buy certain stocks, the SEC said. □

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Mars rover captures 1st sound of dust devil on red planet

By **MARCIA DUNN**

AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

(AP) — What's a dust devil sound like on Mars? A NASA rover by chance had its microphone on when a whirling tower of red dust passed directly overhead, recording the racket.

It's about 10 seconds of not only rumbling gusts of up to 25 mph (40 kph), but the pinging of hundreds of dust particles against the rover Perseverance. Scientists released the first-of-its-kind audio Tuesday.

The dust devil came and went over Perseverance quickly last year, thus the short length of the audio, said the University of Toulouse's Naomi Murdoch, lead author of the study appearing in Nature Communications. At the same time, the navigation camera on the parked rover captured images, while its weather-monitoring instrument collected data.

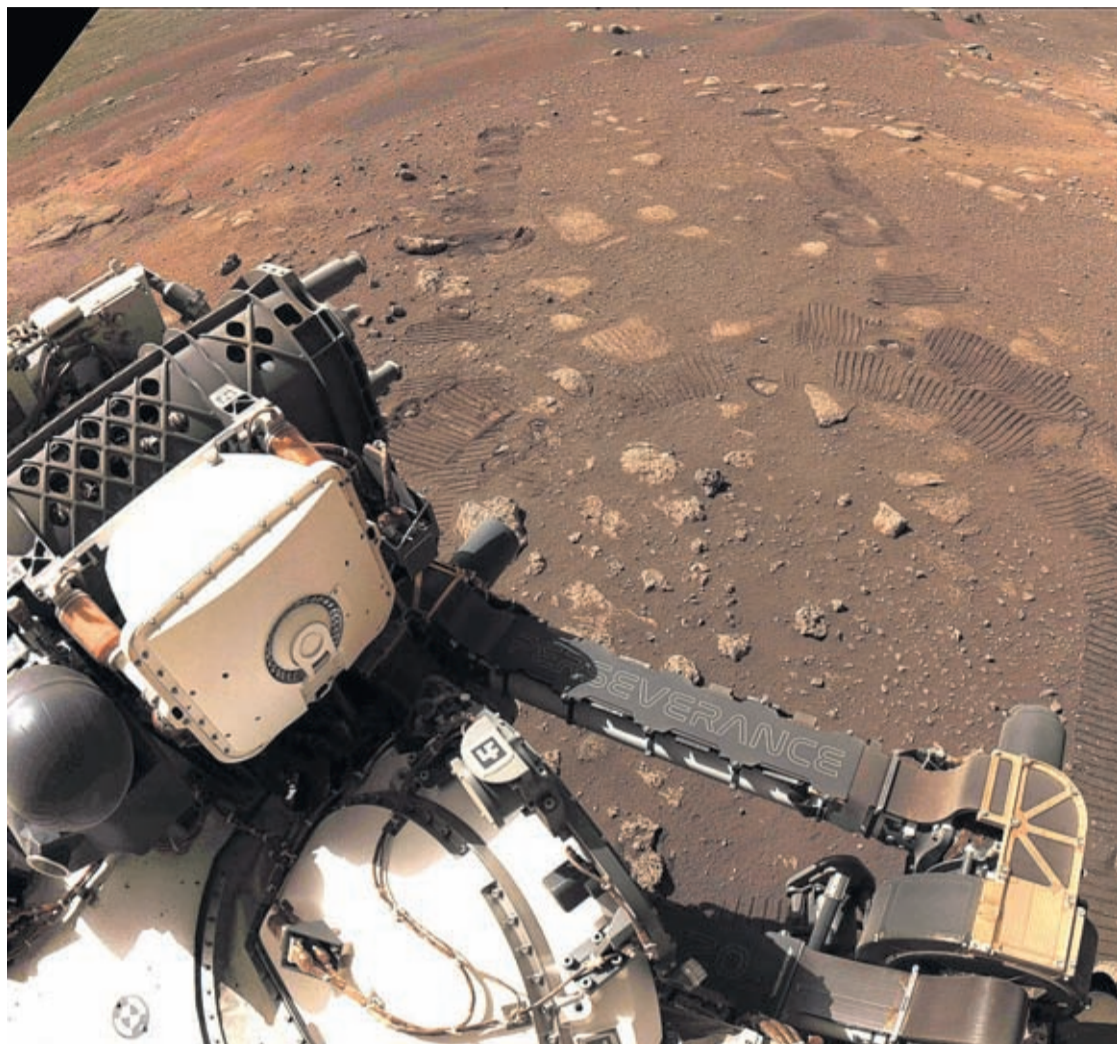
"It was fully caught red-handed by Persy," said co-author German Martinez of the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston.

Photographed for decades at Mars but never heard until now, dust devils are common at the red planet. This one was in the average range: at least 400 feet (118 meters) tall and 80 feet (25 meters) across, traveling at 16 feet (5 meters) per second.

The microphone picked up 308 dust pings as the dust devil whipped by, said Murdoch, who helped build it. Given that the rover's SuperCam microphone is turned on for less than three minutes every few days, Murdoch said it was "definitely luck" that the dust devil appeared when it did on Sept. 27, 2021. She estimates there was just a 1-in-200 chance of capturing dust-devil audio.

Of the 84 minutes collected in its first year, there's "only one dust devil recording," she wrote in an email from France.

This same microphone on Perseverance's mast provided the first sounds from Mars — namely the Martian wind — soon after the



This photo made available by NASA was taken during the first drive of the Perseverance rover on Mars on March 4, 2021.

Associated Press

rover landed in February 2021. It followed up with audio of the rover driving around and its companion helicopter, little Ingenuity, flying nearby, as well as the crackle of the rover's rock-zapping lasers, the main reason for the microphone. These recordings allow scientists to study the Martian wind, atmospheric turbulence and now dust

movement as never before, Murdoch said. The results "demonstrate just how valuable acoustic data can be in space exploration."

On the prowl for rocks that might contain signs of ancient microbial life, Perseverance has collected 18 samples so far at Jezero Crater, once the scene of a river delta. NASA plans

to return these samples to Earth a decade from now. The helicopter Ingenuity has logged 36 flights, the longest lasting almost three minutes. □

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Review: 'Avatar: The Way of Water' is a big screen blast

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP Film Writer

It is impossible to talk about "Avatar: The Way of Water" without sounding hyperbolic. But James Cameron's sequel is a truly dazzling cinematic experience that will have you floating on a blockbuster high.

No matter if you've spent a second of your life in the past 13 years thinking about what's happening on Pandora or how Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) are getting on, assuming you remember their characters' names. "The Way of Water" will make awestruck believers out of even "Avatar" agnostics like me, at least for three hours and 12 minutes. The film isn't just visually compelling, either, it's spiritually rich as well as a simple but penetrating story about family and the natural world that is galaxies better than the first.

About that run time: Three hours and 12 minutes sounds excessive, but there is something decidedly decadent about really committing that much time to a movie in a theater. When the filmmaker is purposeful with that time, as Cameron is and many others have been before him, it's a uniquely rewarding experience. In other words, it's not a big ask. And you'll forget all about checking the time from the first shot of Pandora and Jake's



This image released by 20th Century Studios shows Trinity Bliss, as Tuk, in a scene from "Avatar: The Way of Water."

earnest exposition about what's been going on in the past decade.

He and Neytiri have three kids now, Neteyam (Jamie Flatters), Lo'ak (Britain Dalton), Tuk (Trinity Jo-Li Bliss) and an adopted teenage daughter, Kiri (Sigourney Weaver), and they're happy living in the forest. "Happiness is simple," he says. "Who ever thought that a jughead like me could crack the code?" So, of course, it can't last. The humans are on the hunt for Jake, with a familiar antagonist leading the charge. And soon his family is on the run, taking up home in another part of Pandora, on the water with a new tribe

led by Ronal (Kate Winslet) and Tonowari (Cliff Curtis) who reluctantly grant them refuge and try to teach them how to live on the water.

It's worth noting that Cameron has not stuffed the film with mind-numbing, wall-to-wall action and needlessly complicated plot. There are long stretches of movie where we're simply exploring the environment with the characters, delighting in the intricacies of a reef or basking in the beauty of giant sea creatures. Sometimes we're just sitting in the water with Kiri who is also sitting in the water. It is not advancing the action in any obvious way.

It is not even really developing characters. It just is, and it's serene. You imagine that anyone without his clout would have a hard time justifying something similar.

The action is there, too, of course, and it's exciting because you've become invested in the family and worried about the kids who are never where they're supposed to be and are often in danger because of it. And though we know there are more sequels coming, and one already wrapped, this is not the kind of franchise where anyone is guaranteed to get a fake superhero death. Sure there is some

"Avatar" silliness, including the fact that the word "bro" is uttered about 8,000 times, but there is something admirable about the straightforward dialogue and emotions at play, too. No one is snarking their way through this ordeal.

"Never doubt James Cameron" has become a bit of a rallying cry lately, at least among those left on Twitter. It's all the more extraordinary as the once-mythical sequels had become a kind of joke in the years since the first movie. Even as "The Way of Water" release date actually approached the "who cares?" chorus intensified. Had anyone really thought twice about "Avatar"? But Cameron knows his way around a thrilling sequel, and the water for that matter (and references his own greatest hits in this film, too). But then people saw it and the tune changed. There is something comforting about the fact that we are capable of intense, collective cultural whiplash. That "who cares?" can turn to uncynical amazement in an instant. Is that the magic of the movies? Of continuing to push the bounds of the big screen experience? Of betting big on weird-sounding stories about giant blue environmentalists instead of superheroes every so often? Maybe it's just the magic of James Cameron. □

Associated Press

Eddie Murphy to receive Cecil B. DeMille award at Globes



Honoree actor-comedian Eddie Murphy attends the WSJ. Magazine 2019 Innovator Awards in New York on Nov. 6, 2019. Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Eddie Murphy will receive the Cecil B. DeMille Award at the 80th Golden Globes, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association announced Wednesday. The honorary award for the comedian and actor adds to a broadcast that's taking shape after two years of scandal and backlash tarnished the Globes. After taking the previous Globes off the air, NBC will telecast the ceremony Tuesday, Jan. 10, with comedian Jerrod

Carmichael hosting. On a one-year deal with NBC, the Globes are attempting to make a comeback after a Los Angeles Times investigation in early 2021 found that the press association then had no Black members and enumerated a long history of ethical indiscretions. Many stars and studios said they would boycott the show, and NBC canceled the 2022 broadcast. The films "The Banshees of Inisherin" and "Everything Everywhere All at

Once" led in nominations to the Globes announced Monday. "Abbott Elementary" topped TV nominees. Murphy has been nominated for a Globe six times before, winning once, for his performance in 2006's "Dreamgirls." His most recent nomination was for best actor in a comedy or musical for 2019's "Dolemite Is My Name." Previous honorees for the Cecil B. DeMille Award include Tom Hanks, Oprah Winfrey and Meryl Streep. □

Catching up: Zunino gives Guardians upgrade, better bat

By TOM WITHERS

AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — The Guardians don't need Mike Zunino to be an All-Star, though they wouldn't mind if he became one again.

Cleveland needs him to hit and deepen its lineup, and Zunino has shown he's qualified. The AL Central champions upgraded an offensive void on Thursday by signing Zunino to a \$6 million, one-year contract. The 31-year-old hit a career-high 33 home runs for Tampa Bay in 2021, and the Guardians are confident he can provide some extra power for a team that hit just 127 homers last season. Zunino is also a solid defensive player, a prerequisite for a team built around its pitching staff.

"The fact that he is such a good defender, works with the pitching staff so well," Guardians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said. "In our view, he's not too far removed from a really productive offensive season in 2021, so we think we've improved in that spot and we're excit-



Tampa Bay Rays' Mike Zunino follows through on a three-run home run during the fourth inning of the team's baseball game against the Seattle Mariners, Thursday, May 5, 2022, in Seattle.

Associated Press

ed to have him in the fold." Cleveland entered the off-season looking to improve its catching situation mainly from an offensive standpoint. Austin Hedges and Luke Maile were both solid receivers, but didn't do much with the bat.

While Hedges was an invaluable clubhouse leader and strong defensively as

Cleveland's primary starter, he batted just .163 in 105 games. Maile hit .221 in 76 games. Despite being the major's youngest teams, the Guardians won the AL Central by placing a premium on quality at-bats, making contact and getting on base, by any means necessary. It's a different approach in this swing-or-

strike out era, and Zunino is eager to join in on the fun. "It's exciting, the speed dynamic in the lineup is really enticing," he said. "It's just different ways to effect games. I think there's a reason why you've seen the success they had last year and growing from that. With these young guys continuing to get confident, it's

only going to get better." Zunino's signing follows the Guardians locking up slugger Josh Bell, who has 130 homers in seven seasons and will bolster the middle of Cleveland's order.

Zunino played in just 36 games in 2022 before undergoing surgery thoracic outlet syndrome in his left arm. It's a condition that causes numbness in the affected extremity, and in this case to Zunino's non-throwing arm.

He's been recovering and has progressed the point that he's hitting off a tee. Zunino hasn't faced live pitching yet, and is currently focused on strengthening his core muscles as he builds back. "There's a lot that goes into swings, whether it's obliques, whether it's a bunch of things," he said. "So, building some reps when I challenge myself and get to that point, I'll be good to go. I've been symptom-free, gaining strength, mobility has been great. So I've been able to continue what would be a normal offseason for me." □

NFL kicks off Inspire Change weeks with 5 new grants

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL has awarded through its Inspire Change social justice initiative five new national grants to organizations focused on police and community relations.

The recipients were announced Thursday as the league will highlight its commitment to social justice over the next two weeks with each team participating in game-day stadium activations and awareness. The five new national grant partners are: Atlanta Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative (PAD), Chicago's Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) Co-Responder Program, Choose 180, Gulf Coast Jewish Family Services Community Assistance and Life Liaison Program (CALL), and Peace for DC.

"Focusing on building police and community relations is where real change and impact will be cre-

ated community by community," said former NFL linebacker Takeo Spikes, a Players Coalition Advocate and Executive Task Force Member.

The NFL has provided more than \$244 million to more than 40 national grant partners and more than 600 grassroots organizations across the country since 2017. The league is already approaching its 10-year, \$250 million commitment to social justice efforts. The five new national grant partners received a total of \$950,000. They were recently approved by the Social Justice Working Group, comprised of three active players, three former players and five team owners.

"It's awesome because everybody who sits in that room or everybody who has a seat at the table, we all have vested interest," Spikes said. "And that vested interest is making

sure not only that the communities are being serviced the way that they're supposed to, because we understand that we all have seats in these communities, but more than anything, it's our way of being able to give back and do something that's going to be monumental by having diverse people at the table that come from different backgrounds, different ethnicities.

"But we have one common goal, and that is to make sure that people are treated properly and to provide resources."

The league this year also introduced the Inspire Change Changemaker Award, given to 32 individuals, one from each team, who are making a difference in their communities through social justice work, either individually or as part of a nonprofit organization. Each Changemaker will be



Former NFL players Jim Brown, left, and Takeo Spikes are shown during a sports and activism panel entitled "From Protest to Progress: Next Steps" Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017, in San Jose, Calif.

Associated Press

announced or recognized during Weeks 15 and 16 by their respective club.

"The significance is huge," Spikes said. "By being able to get this award implemented now, people across the nation will see that guys care about so much outside of the game

and they're making their investment back into the game, into the community."

All 32 recipients will receive a \$10,000 donation, courtesy of the NFL Foundation, to the social justice nonprofit organization of their choice. □

Messi carries the weight of Argentina into World Cup final

By **JAMES ROBSON**

AP Soccer Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — As Lionel Messi approaches his second and likely last World Cup final, the stakes could hardly be higher.

The same goes for Argentina after more than 30 years of disappointment since it last won soccer's ultimate prize.

For Messi, victory against France at Lusail Stadium on Sunday is a chance to finally get his hands on the one major trophy that has eluded him in his storied career.

In doing so, he would push ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo, who has also never won a World Cup, in the long-running rivalry between the two greatest players of their generation. While 37-year-old Ronaldo exited the tournament at the quarterfinals stage, benched by Portugal and in tears in the likely recognition that his last chance had passed, Messi is summoning some of his finest moments in an Argentina shirt to inspire his country's run to the final.

"Each time we see him play, he makes us and the players feel something special," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "There's something about him that



Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates at the end of the World Cup semifinal soccer match between Argentina and Croatia at the Lusail Stadium in Lusail, Qatar, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2022.

people like, not only Argentinians.

"We feel lucky and privileged to have him wear our shirt."

Messi's place alongside Diego Maradona as one of Argentina's two most iconic soccer stars has been secure for some time now. But he is yet to emulate Maradona's greatest achievement by leading his national team to a World Cup title.

Maradona did that in Mexico in 1986 and Messi has lived with the expectation

of repeating the feat since he emerged as a prodigy at Barcelona nearly 20 years ago.

There have been numerous false hopes during that time.

There was the potential "dream team" of Maradona as coach and Messi as star player in South Africa in 2010. But Argentina went out in the quarterfinals after being beaten 4-0 by Germany.

In 2014, with Messi approaching his peak years, Argentina reached the fi-

nal in Brazil.

Again it faced Germany. Again Messi was on the losing side, beaten 1-0 through extra time.

At the age of 35, he knew this was probably his last shot at the World Cup and he has risen to the occasion as the tournament's co-leading scorer with France forward Kylian Mbappé with five goals.

Perhaps more notable have been his assists, such as the disguised pass for Nahuel Molina's goal against the Netherlands in

the quarterfinals.

Then there was his mesmerizing run, turning Croatia defender Joško Gvardiol inside out, before setting up Julián Álvarez for Argentina's third in the semis.

"It's at least something I can talk (about) with my kids one day that I guarded this great, great player," Gvardiol said Thursday.

Those assists have been indicative of the fact that Messi can no longer do it on his own. The emergence of Álvarez, with four goals, has been vital to Argentina's progress.

Messi doesn't dominate for an entire 90 minutes anymore. Instead, he decides matches with key moments.

He isn't as dynamic as he was in his younger years, but he has been more influential than at any of his previous four World Cups.

While Messi is aiming to complete his personal collection of trophies, having won four Champions League titles and seven Ballon d'Or awards for the best player in the world, Argentina is looking to end its long wait for a third World Cup. It won the tournament for the first time when hosting in 1978 and then again eight years later thanks to Maradona. □

Associated Press

Billie Moore, 1st U.S. women's Olympic basketball coach, dies

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Billie Moore, who coached the first U.S. Olympic women's basketball team to a silver medal at the 1976 Montreal Games, has died. She was 79. UCLA, where Moore was the women's head coach from 1977-93, announced Thursday that she died from cancer at home Wednesday night in Fullerton, California, surrounded by family and friends.

Moore was the first coach in women's basketball history to lead teams from two different schools to national championships. She guided Cal State Fullerton to the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women title in 1970 and

UCLA to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) title in 1978. Moore was inducted in both the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 1999.

She began her coaching career as an assistant at Southern Illinois. Moore then spent eight seasons at Cal State Fullerton, where she went 140-15. Moore led UCLA to a 27-3 mark in 1978 and posted a record 296 victories in her 16 years with the Bruins. In her 24-year career, she finished with a 436-196 record.

Moore guided the U.S. women's Olympic team at the Montreal Games near-

ly a half century ago. Her team featured trailblazers of the game Pat Summitt, Ann Meyers Drysdale and Nancy Lieberman, who went 3-2 and finished runner up to the powerhouse Soviet Union team (5-0).

USA Basketball said in a statement it was "proud to have been part of (Moore's) journey. Our thoughts are with her loved ones at this difficult time."

The current U.S. Olympic coach, South Carolina's Dawn Staley, said on social media that women's basketball "lost a legend today in Billie Moore ... thank you coach for servicing our game with class, dignity and purpose." □



Inductees of the 1999 Basketball Hall of Fame pose together following a news conference in Springfield, Mass., Friday, Oct. 1, 1999. From left are Wayne Embry, Kevin McHale, Billie Moore, John Thompson and Carl Bennett, who is accepting the award for Fred Zollner. Billie Moore, who coached the first U.S. Olympic women's basketball team to a silver medal at the Montreal Games in 1976, has died.

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